

HIGH-SPEED SAINTS THROW THE LEAGUE RACE INTO CONFUSION

St. Albans City 2,
Wycombe Wanderers 0

ALBANS CITY threw the Isthmian League championship chase into utter confusion with two of the most valuable points any club is likely to gain anywhere this season, when trouncing Wycombe Wanderers on Tuesday evening.

Speed was of the essence on the wide, open plain of Clarence Park, a pitch ready made for fluidity of football.

Wycombe could equal their record, but, without John Roney, Les Hartridge and Norman Hutchinson, fell short of the required teamwork. But at a match!

For the first time this season

Wanderers lost to a side that, on the night at least, were a more powerful, controlled combination.

OUT OF GLOVE

Wycombe, success and Clarence Park is a trio which has not exactly gone hand in glove for quite some seasons now. But the Blues had the psychological boost of a 3-2 home win already to their names, and the knowledge that league leaders Sutton mustn't be allowed to strengthen their position at the top.

Sutton's 2-1 defeat of Bromley on Tuesday makes it as tight as this in the summit regions.

ISTHMIAN LEAGUE (Top Positions)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sutton U	24	19	1	4	47	23	39
Enfield	23	14	5	4	34	13	33
Hendon	23	13	5	5	62	21	31
Wycombe W	20	14	3	3	46	18	31
St. Alb C	19	12	5	2	41	18	29

Saints, breaking out from a packed midfield system, are the only serious rivals to Wycombe attacks' reputation as the most slippery in Isthmian football. And they soon showed why in the opening minutes.

Bobby Childs began what, for him, was to become an eventful night, with two shots to unsettle the visiting defence. Centre-forward Roberts followed up with a hat-trick of goal attempts, two of which forced John Maskell into conceding corners.

The yellow-shirted peril made life uncomfortable for a harassed Keith Blunt. Ian Rundle, appearing at centre-half while both Delaney and Hartridge licked their wounds from recent combat, also found it hard to settle against opponents who know him so well.

UP TO TED

So, it was up to captain for the night Ted Powell to stabilise what statistically and on-field is one of the most reliable backlines in amateur football.

The one major flaw in St. Albans' plan could on several occasions have proved their undoing. For they play the game ultra fast, sometimes so fast they can't keep pace with themselves. Thus mistakes and misplaced passes inevitably interfered with their entertaining methods.

In defeat Wanderers take heart from the form of Larry Pritchard, who along with Paul Fuschillo clearly upset the Saints' rhythm by pushing positively into the home defence.

More than once, Saints' keeper, Howard, juggled with Pritchard shots, and towards half-time, with Barry Baker enjoying a short but active purple patch in midfield, the Wanderers looked to be gaining the initiative.

Full-back White was glad to put the ball away for a corner when under pressure and Howard sprang to cover a drive from Geoff Anthony off the left.

EITHER WAY

If Saints had had just the better of the first half, the score still might have gone either way, as Butterfield suggested with a long range crack at goal which narrowly topped the crossbar, and Horseman emphasised with a low effort that Howard turned for a corner. Both shots came shortly before the interval.

The second half was not short of incident, but still proved slightly disappointing.

Although play at first centred on St. Albans' territory from the resumption, a breakaway movement put Wanderers in a quandary after 50 minutes. Wycombe's defence was wrong footed stylishly but Childs again saw a fine effort rise just that little bit too high.

Seventeen minutes into the new half an incident involving Keith Searle and Childs to the side of St. Albans' net could

have turned ugly and certainly added a new needle into the game. Referee Bayston, who was inclined to keep play moving as much as possible, often to the points of over-leniency, gave both players a severe talking-to.

Searle, having made the original foul, was annoyed by Childs' retaliation and returned the compliment with a deliberate two handed push. The City fans cried "off, off, off", but Mr. Bayston wisely assessed it as six of one . . .

Saints soon calmed down though, when Childs placed a fine swinging shot through a narrow gap just inside the post after 70 minutes, to put them into a winning lead.

Even then, Wanderers had justifiable cause to feel hard done by.

The referee should have stopped play at least twice for different infringements of the rules as Saints mounted their attack, and indeed early in the movement he stunned the entire Wycombe contingent when putting the whistle to his lips but then changing his mind and allowing play to continue.

This was after Bernie Bremer had been upended as the visitors pressed home a raid.

It was fatal for the Blues, whose thoughts must have been pointing to a share of the points at the time.

Two minutes later, Childs hit

the headlines again, this time with a booking after an incident which left John Mask sprawled out in the Wycombe box.

And, it was Childs' corner lifted from the right, that fouled Roberts for a hope backheader into goal, settling the result once and for all the 79th minute.

Having thrown off Sutton United's 2-0 lead to score four goals in the last ten minutes recently, City knew full well that Wanderers had enough time to pull back. A Wycombe's effort certainly couldn't be taken lightly.

But, 2-0 just about sums up the match, and 2-0 it stays with Wycombe still searching for new ways of taming Prosser's Saints.

In a way, it is to be hoped team ever does. For City's tractive brand of football mauls them, not only very real contenders, but also the most entertaining club Wycombe is likely to meet for some time come.

ST. ALBANS CITY: T. Hows, P. White, L. Burgess, P. Wood, M. Pardey, D. Neville, J. Ox, R. Childs, T. Roberts, J. Butterfield. (sub. P. Collett not used).

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: Maskell, P. Fuschillo, K. Blunt, E. Powell, I. Rundle, B. Ball, B. Bremer, A. Horseman, K. Seal, L. Pritchard, C. Anthony (sub. Faulkner notused).

Referee: M. J. Bayston (Hitch).
Half time: 0-0. Goalscorers: Albans—Childs (70), Roberts (79).